

Legislative Priorities

Q. Before the tobacco regulations came up this news conference was billed as your chance to give a farewell message to Congress. If you could send them a postcard from Jackson next week—[laughter]—what would you list as your top three or four priorities?

The President. We need to pass a decent budget that balances the budget but doesn't do it on the backs of elderly people who don't have enough to live on by exploding their Medicare costs; it doesn't walk away from our commitment to education, the education of our young people from Head Start to more affordable college loans through national service; that doesn't undermine our common commitment to the environment. We can find common ground on this budget that brings the American people together and moves us forward.

The second thing I would say is, we need to pass welfare reform. We need to pass welfare reform—work, time limits, responsible parenting.

The third thing I would say is, let's get to work on the unfinished agenda here, pass the antiterrorism bill, the line-item veto, appoint the political reform commission. Let's get after it. Let's do the things that we all are for, we keep saying we're for. Let's deliver for the American people.

Let me say in closing that my family and I are leaving on Tuesday for Wyoming, and I want you to enjoy your vacation.

Thank you, and God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 101st news conference began at 1:32 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Interview With Tabitha Soren of MTV
August 11, 1995

Teenage Smoking

Ms. Soren. Mr. President, minors buy one billion packs of cigarettes a year. How are you going to make not smoking and quitting smoking cool and attractive to young people?

The President. Well, I think we have to do several things. I think, first of all, the Government's responsibility is to make sure that the young people understand that it's addictive and dangerous and can kill them and that about one-third of the young people who start smoking every day—about 1,000 people a day, young people, start smoking who will have their lives shortened because of it. The second thing I think you have to do is make it less accessible. Then the third thing we have to do is make it less attractive, that is, we need to change the advertising and limit the ability of advertising to be a lure.

We had a young teenager in here who was part of an antismoking group yesterday who said to me—I was so touched—she said, "We look at these TV ads," she said, "these girls smoking, they're always tall; they're always thin; they always have long hair; they're always pretty." She said, "It's just like when the boys who are young

see a movie star holding a gun." And it was shocking what she said.

And then what we want the tobacco companies to do is to spend some money on an affirmative strategy to put out positive messages—over MTV, for example—about how it's cool not to smoke instead of to smoke. So I think you make it less accessible, less attractive, and then put out a positive message. And of course, we need a lot of help. We need people like you to do programs like this, and every parent in this country needs to talk to their children—all the parents need to talk to their children about it, because we now have done 14 months careful research and we know how damaging this is, and we know that the tobacco companies know how damaging it is from their own files. We've got to do something about it.

Ms. Soren. Do you worry about making smoking more enticing by making it more forbidden to young people?

The President. I think that's always a concern; there could be some of that. But the staggering magnitude of the damage that it's doing is so great, I think if young people really understand how dangerous it really is and all the things that can happen to them and how it can affect

their future, I don't think it will be more glamorous.

Ms. Soren. You know, though, what kids are going to say. In a time where they're growing up and sex is associated with AIDS, alcohol with drunk driving, going out late at night you could be shot, it's very violent, smoking during your adolescence almost seems like a lesser evil.

The President. I know it does, but in some ways it's the thing that puts the most at risk over the long run. And we have to do something about the other things, too. I've fought very hard to get the assault weapons out of the hands of gang members, to pass the Brady bill, to put more police officers on the street. The crime rate is going down in almost every—almost every big city in this country, the crime rate is going down. We have to—we're doing a better job trying to keep big shipments of drugs out of the country. We're working hard on that.

But this is a serious problem. On alcohol, it's less accessible than cigarettes. It's still a problem, but I want a zero tolerance drunk driving law for young people in every State in the country or here in the Congress. But the cigarettes—the magnitude of the damage caused is greater than all of that right now. And we just have to focus on it.

I know it—because there normally is a period of several years between the time you start and keep smoking and the time you face the consequences, and when you're young you think you're going to live forever, I know that it's going to be harder to get young people to focus on that. But we have to. There's a lot of destructive behavior in America we need to attack at the same time, and I just think that we can get these numbers way, way down.

You gave the number—a billion packs of cigarettes or a billion cigarettes a year—we can get that way down. And when we do, we'll get the life expectancy of these young people and their quality of life way up.

Ms. Soren. Did you ever experiment with cigarettes as a teen? Did you go through that phase?

The President. I didn't. But I'm surprised I didn't, but I didn't. The reason I didn't is because my mother was a heavy smoker. She smoked a couple of packs of cigarettes a day until my daughter got her to quit for her 8th birthday. When my daughter turned 8, her grandmother gave her that for a present. So

I had a bad feeling about it from childhood. But it was only because of that. I'm sure I would have done it otherwise.

Ms. Soren. Why were you savvy enough to have a bad feeling about it? You didn't like the smell of the house, or you didn't like—

The President. Yes, I didn't like the smell in the house. And I thought it was—it struck me as a bad habit, kind of a nervous habit, a reliance. And I had a feeling that it was not good for her health.

Ms. Soren. What would you say to Chelsea if you saw her fall under peer pressure of some of her friends and start smoking or if you found ashes in her bedroom in an ashtray or something?

The President. I would talk to her about it and tell her I thought it was a bad idea. She's the most militant person in our house, though.

Ms. Soren. Yes, it doesn't sound like you're worried.

The President. She and Hillary are always on me. You know, as I confessed yesterday, I still, once in a great while, maybe five, six, seven times a year, will smoke a cigar when I'm outside. They think that's awful—at all. And I've got to do better with it. But if they see me chewing one on the golf course or something, they're on me. So my family is doing a better job with it than I am.

Ms. Soren. Some kids I talk to said that nothing but an outright ban on cigarettes would deter them. So why not a ban? Because cigarettes are just as deadly, if not more so, for adults.

The President. They are, but they're not illegal. You have to go through all the same problems we went through with prohibition with liquor. It would have significant economic dislocations for a large number of Americans. And I think as a practical matter, because so many adults are, in effect, hooked on it, it would be very, very difficult to enforce.

What I want to do is to phase it out over time by getting—if young people stop using cigarettes—if we could get young people, the usage down to zero, then eventually it will phase out. That would be my goal. I think we just have to start with our young people.

Ms. Soren. Do you consider tobacco companies evil?

The President. I wouldn't go that far. I don't think that. And I certainly don't consider the tobacco farmers evil. I think they're good peo-

ple. Most of them—a lot of them come from families that have been doing it 100, sometimes 200 years.

I think some of these companies have known for a long time, according to their own documents, that nicotine was both addictive and destructive. And they have—insofar as they have pretended that they did not know that, that is wrong.

I think some of these companies have said, we don't want teenagers to smoke, but they have consciously directed their advertising strategies to make it appealing to young people and not just Joe Camel, which was obvious, but a lot of other things as well. I think those things are wrong.

And what I want the tobacco companies to do is stop doing the wrong thing and start doing the right thing. I think they ought to come in here and support this—these restrictions. I think they ought to ask Congress to enact them into law now. If they don't want the FDA to regulate them, let's enact the law now. And I think that we ought to start the very next day on this campaign together. If the tobacco companies really don't want kids to smoke, we can do this together.

Ms. Soren. Are you going to try to bring back the cigarette tax? California has had a lot of success with that in their State.

The President. Well, this Congress would not adopt that. I have had a number of people who've come from tobacco countries suggest that some of the cigarette tax ought to be devoted to helping the farmers who want to convert their farmland to other purposes, to some sort of buy-out program.

But I think that right now what we ought to do is—the bulk of the cigarette tax is available to the States, and a lot of the States now are passing cigarette taxes to help to pay for the health care bills of people who are suffering from tobacco-related illnesses. And I don't want to see the Congress and the Federal Government crowd that out. So when I proposed a tobacco tax before, it was to pay for health care. That's not going to happen this year.

Ms. Soren. Right now, advertising is written off as a business expense, and that means the public pays in some fashion for all advertising, including cigarette advertising. Would you consider getting rid of the tax deduction for cigarette advertising?

The President. You're the first person who's ever suggested it to me. I'd never thought of that. That's an interesting idea.

Ms. Soren. So I'll give you a few minutes to absorb it, and I'll come back.

The President. That's an interesting idea. I've never thought of that.

Ms. Soren. Because I think a lot of people would be offended by the idea of paying for an unhealthy product to advertise and garner more smokers through it. But I'll let you dwell on it.

Not only do you want to regulate tobacco products, but you're also in favor of regulating how they're marketed. And I was wondering, how far do you plan to go? When a musician sits down to talk with me and they're smoking a cigarette, should I not air that footage on MTV? Should I ask Keith Richards to put out his cigarette before he does an interview with me? Should this go for all television? Because of lot of young people watch MTV.

The President. I think that's a decision for you to make. I think you should ask him to put it out because I think there are a lot of young people—

Ms. Soren. It is Keith Richards.

The President. I know. [Laughter] And I know he's an icon—for me, too.

Ms. Soren. I don't know if he—his heart might stop if he doesn't have a cigarette.

The President. That's the great thing about their endurance, you know.

But that's a decision that each network, each interviewer, they'll have to make. Let me just say this: I believe very strongly in the first amendment and the right to free speech, free association, and freedom of religion. I believe in a very broad interpretation of it. But I believe that we should be restricting advertising directed at children because it's illegal to sell cigarettes to children. So, therefore, if it's illegal to sell cigarettes to children, it can't be illegal to stop the advertising directed at children. So that's what my focus is.

In terms of the interviews and everything, I would hope every American adult, even those who smoke, would think, as I had to when I became President and I had this occasional bad habit of having my cigar once in a while, I would hope they would think about not doing it in public, not doing it around children, not setting a bad example. I think we adults have a responsibility to try to set a good standard

for our young people and to basically say everybody's got a lot of problems, but being self-destructive is not a way to deal with them.

Ms. Soren. Mr. President, I want to say this as politely as I can, but I think a lot of our viewers are going to be wondering why should they listen to you about this issue?

The President. Well, they don't have to listen to me about this issue. What we're going to do is change the law. But I'll tell you why they should listen to me or to anybody else. I would say that if they wanted to listen to me, don't listen to me, look at the medical research, look at the evidence. This is about their lives, not mine. I've lived most of my life. Their lives are ahead of them. And the reason they should listen to me is that the evidence is on my side, not just because I'm President. We know that nicotine in cigarettes and smokeless tobacco is addictive, is destructive, and will shorten the lives of one out of three people who start smoking on a regular basis. We know that.

So what they should do is say, "Okay, here's the evidence; now, what kind of life do I want to live?" Ultimately, it's going to be their decision, because even if the law keeps cigarettes away from them in the near-term, soon they'll turn 18, and they'll be able to do whatever they want to do. They have to make these decisions. But I think—my job, what I'm trying to do here every day and with the economy, with saving the college loan program, with trying to preserve the environment from this awful assault that the Congress is making on it, is to give the young people of our country a good country to grow up into and a good life to look forward to. Then they have to make a decision about how to live that life.

And what those of us who are older are supposed to do is to say here's what we think will maximize your choices. Here's what we think will give you the chance to live up to the fullest of your abilities. And that's what I hope they'll listen to, because the evidence is on my side. I'm not just preaching here, I have all this evidence.

Ms. Soren. Right. Right. It's not like you don't have enough things to do already.

The President. But this is a big deal. Look, look. Everything I try to do here, if you look at—let's just take trying to save the college loan program from attack and trying to preserve the environmental protections we have in this country. Why would I do that? Because I want my

child and our grandchildren and all the young people coming up to enjoy a good life. That still requires all these individuals who are watching us to make decisions about how they're going to live. And being addicted to tobacco is not a smart thing to do if you want to have a long, full, good life. It's a huge roll of the dice.

I never will forget a few years ago having to speak at the funeral of a very close friend of mine, a man that had literally no other vices. He was one of the most perfect human beings I ever knew. But he smoked a couple of packs of cigarettes a day, and he died of lung cancer 2½ years after he had his last cigarette because it takes that long to clean out your lungs.

Ms. Soren. Wow.

The President. And he was younger than me. I never got over it. I never will get over it.

Abortion

Ms. Soren. While I have you, there are a couple of other issues I wanted to ask you about that are important to young voters, in addition to smoking and their health, which you sort of rattled off very quickly.

First, though, the woman best known as Jane Roe, whose struggle to obtain an abortion led to the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision, has come out against anything but first trimester abortions. How big a blow do you feel this is to the pro-choice movement?

The President. Well, as I understand it, she's gone through a number of changes in her life and had a serious religious conversion and believes that abortion is wrong now. The rule of *Roe v. Wade* is it permits everybody in America to make that same decision. That is, I think there are too many abortions in America. I have always believed that abortion should be rare but that they should be safe and legal until the third trimester when the child can live outside the mother's womb. If somebody hasn't made the decision by then, unless the life of the mother's in danger, I think they should be illegal, and they were in my State.

But I think that leaving the decision to the woman and her doctor and whoever else she wishes to consult, I think on balance is still the right decision in our country. And that makes it possible for people like this woman to make up her own mind and to have her own convictions and then try to persuade other people that she's right. It leaves her free to

say, "My religious conviction is what is right for all of you; I hope you will follow me." People can do that.

And we have a very vibrant, as you know, pro-life movement in this country of people trying to convince other people of that all the time. But we don't say to people who disagree that we're going to criminalize your conduct until the child can live outside the mother's womb. And I think, on balance, that is the right position for our country, and I would stick with it.

Ms. Soren. Since abortion is under such attack in Congress, do you think that you should be doing more to support the pro-choice movement?

The President. Well, I don't know what else I can do. I'm doing—I think I'm doing everything I can. I certainly have made it absolutely clear where I stand. I have resisted the attempts in the Congress to take away the rights of choice to women in the service, to women who work for the Federal Government.

There is a wholesale assault on the right to choose going on in the Congress now in all kinds of little, indirect ways. And I hope we can beat it back because I think it's—I don't think that's the right thing to do. I don't think the law here is the way to resolve all these problems.

Opposition in Congress

Ms. Soren. You've used executive actions in the first 2 years of your Presidency for issues like abortion. And in recent months, with the Republican majority, you've turned to them more frequently, the regulation of teenage smoking being the most recent one. Do you feel like you're subverting the will of Congress by tackling issues this way?

The President. No. I think that I probably should have been doing more of this all along. But in the first 2 years, I had to pour all of my energies into trying to do something to bring the deficit down, to invest more in education, to try to expand trade, and get the economy going again. And we were able to do that, but the voters still gave the Congress to the Republicans. And now it frees me up, in a way, to—most of my efforts, to try to keep them from undoing the gains we have made from wrecking an economic strategy or wrecking the education program or wrecking the environment.

But I can now do things like use my executive authority, for example, to promote welfare reform in all 50 States, to do the other things that we talked about. So I think I probably should have been doing more of it all along.

President's Legal Defense Fund

Ms. Soren. Today lawyers for the legal defense fund are announcing how much money they've raised. Does that make you feel awkward to have them up there saying, "We've collected this money for the President to defend him?"

The President. No. I mean, it's a little—I wish it weren't necessary. But I'm not a wealthy person and my adversaries decided that they would try to embroil me in all kinds of legal things, and I can't afford to take any time off to think about it. So they're dealing with it the best they can in a legal and appropriate way. And I did not want to go to a few wealthy people and ask them to spend a ton of money to pay all my legal bills. So we resolved that the most appropriate thing to do would be to raise funds in a legal defense fund that had the same financial restrictions that running for Federal office does. And so that's what we've tried to do.

Bosnia

Ms. Soren. Senator Dole and Senator Helms have proposed asking for \$100 million in arms aid for Bosnia. Do you support this legislation?

The President. Not now because the arms embargo is on. My position is that the United States should not, by ourselves, violate the U.N. rule against selling arms into Bosnia because it applies to all Yugoslavia, that instead, what we ought to do is have that U.N. mission there work to stop aggression against Bosnia by letting NATO use its air power and by strengthening the U.N. mission on the ground.

What happened in Srebrenica was awful. But it happened in large measure because the United Nations would not permit the United States and the other NATO allies to take strong action from the air against the Serbs. Now that there's been a real change on the ground and the Serbs have been rolled back in the western part of Bosnia and in Croatia by the Croats, I hope we have a chance to make a decent peace there.

I would not be against—if the U.N. mission fails, I would be for selling arms to the Bosnians or making it possible for the Bosnians to buy arms, but only when we get everybody to lift the arms embargo at the U.N.

But let me just say this in closing. We have an embargo against Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and you see what happened. We put a lot of pressure on it; we now have some defectors coming over, weakening his power. If we say, "We're going to ignore you, and we're going to sell arms to the Bosnians," then what's to prevent other countries from saying, "Okay, we'll ignore the U.N. embargo in Iraq, and we'll bolster Saddam Hussein?"

Rap Music

Ms. Soren. I just have two more quick questions. Do you think it's a good thing that Time-Warner wants to sell Interscope Records? Do you know anything about that?

The President. No.

Death of Jerry Garcia

Ms. Soren. I wanted to ask you if you were—well, Jerry Garcia has affected millions of Americans.

The President. Me, too.

Q. Were you a fan? Have you ever been to a Grateful Dead show? And why do you think he affected so many people of different backgrounds and generations?

The President. Well, first of all, he was just a great talent. I mean, he was really—he was a genius. And I was really pleased to see the Grateful Dead have one more great run around the country, you know, in the last couple of years and see all these young teenagers gravitating to a group that all of us liked 20 or more years ago. He had a great gift. And he even wound up putting out that line of ties. He had great ties. I would go around wearing Jerry Garcia ties and giving them away to people. So I was very sad when he died.

But he also had a terrible problem that was a legacy of the life he lived and the demons he dealt with. And I would hope that all of us who loved his music and valued his contributions would also reflect on the consequences

of, again, really self-destructive behavior. I mean, the lesson of Jerry Garcia's life is that he made a great contribution and he really was a—he had at least two generations of Deadheads, you know.

Ms. Soren. Is Chelsea a fan at all? Has she ever gone to a show?

The President. Yes, very much. But she and I were talking—we had a long talk about it the other day, right before I left to come to the office. She called me on the phone. She's out of town, and she called me on the phone, and we were talking about it. And she was talking about all the kids in her school who are great fans of Jerry Garcia, and we had a long talk about it.

But I would hope that as we mourn him and sort of feel grateful for what he did, we also—young people should say, "I'm not going to die that way. I'm not going to die in a clinic with a drug addiction. I'm not going to do it." You don't have to have a destructive lifestyle to be a genius and make a contribution. You don't have to do that.

Cigarette Advertising

Ms. Soren. Any thoughts on the advertising, cigarette advertising being a tax deduction?

The President. I'll look into it. It's an interesting idea. Nobody ever even raised it to me before. Maybe you should be here making public policy. That's great.

Ms. Soren. I don't think so. I think I'm quite busy. I wouldn't want your job.

The President. Thanks.

NOTE: The interview began at 11 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to rock musicians Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones and the late Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead; Norma McCorvey, plaintiff in the *Roe v. Wade* case; and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Remarks Announcing Comprehensive Nuclear Weapons Test Ban Negotiations

August 11, 1995

Good afternoon. Today I am announcing my decision to negotiate a true zero yield com-

prehensive test ban. This is an historic milestone in our efforts to reduce the nuclear threat to